



School Calendar Concerns



Issue:

The 2011 General Assembly mandated adding five days to each academic year to provide 185 days and 1,025 hours of instruction. While school leaders view this requirement as an opportunity to increase learning time and enhance student achievement, they are encountering barriers in creating an instructionally sound extended calendar due to ongoing constraints from a 2004 mandate requiring most public schools to start classes no earlier than Aug. 25 and end by June 10. Specific concerns regarding the current school calendar requirements include, but are not limited to, the following:

- No additional funding has been provided for the extra five days of instruction, although public schools will incur increased costs for transporting and feeding students, utility usage and other functions associated with extended operating time.
- August 25, 2012 falls on a weekend and June 10, 2013 is a Monday, which further restricts the days available for creating a 185-day calendar for 2012-2013 that is academically sound.
- The calendars for high schools, community colleges and universities are out-of-sync by approximately two weeks, thereby causing scheduling problems for high school students who take courses on higher education campuses to assist with college preparation and/or job-readiness. The problem is most pronounced in the second semester, when college courses begin before high schools complete their final exams in mid-January.
- High school students on the block schedule must take high-stakes end-of-course exams in January after the winter holiday break. Many students and teachers have complained that this timing is not optimal for ensuring student success. Similarly, the amount of instructional time students have before taking Advanced Placement and International Baccalaureate tests has decreased, raising concerns among many high-achieving students.
- The five new instructional days are replacing five teacher workdays that were already in the school calendar, but that change further depletes the time available throughout the year for teachers to meet with parents, complete progress reports and provide remediation to struggling students. Teachers previously lost five workdays with the 2004 calendar law change, and the 2011 change drops their total workdays to 10, which is further reduced for veteran teachers who tap some of those days for vacation time they earn but cannot otherwise use.
- The reduction in workdays limits the opportunity for school systems to provide professional development sessions that help teachers upgrade their skills and maintain their licensure, thus requiring them to earn most of their renewal credits on their own time and expense. Teachers' availability to enroll in higher education courses also is reduced, since their teaching schedule conflicts with their college course schedule. These limitations are exacerbated by the ratcheting up of requirements under both state and federal accountability measures.

Solution:

The 2012 General Assembly should take the following actions to ensure that the school calendar facilitates, rather than impedes, the delivery of a quality education to students across North Carolina:

1. **Provide adequate funding to cover the costs of five additional days of school operations in 2012-2013 or delay implementation of the five extra instructional days until funds are available.**
2. **Restore the ability of local school districts to set the school calendar based on the specific needs of their students and communities. At a minimum, the allowable start date should be revised to permit school systems to conduct the first student attendance day no earlier than August 18 to facilitate the addition of the five instructional days into an instructionally sound calendar.**
3. **Revise the law to allow 185 days OR 1,025 hours of instruction, rather than requiring both, to enable school districts to add learning time to days already built into their instructional calendar.**
4. **Realign the public school calendar with the calendars of community colleges and universities to facilitate dual enrollment and enhance educational opportunities for students.**
5. **Restore and fund at least five of the 10 teacher workdays that have been eliminated since 2004 to ensure teachers have adequate time for professional development, instructional planning, preparation of progress reports, meeting with parents, remediation of struggling students and many other administrative functions that cannot be completed during instructional days.**